**Guided Imagery**

**Definition**

Guided imagery is an alternative therapy program of directed thoughts and suggestions that guide your imagination toward a relaxed, focused state. You can use an instructor, tapes, or scripts to help you through this process.



**Process**

Guided imagery is based on the concept that your body and mind are connected. Using all of your senses, your body seems to respond as though what you are imagining is real.

Ex: Imagine an orange or a lemon in great detail-the smell, the color, the texture of the peel. Continue to imagine the smell of the lemon, and then see yourself taking a bite of the lemon and feel the juice squirting into your mouth.

You can achieve a relaxed state when you imagine all the details of a safe, comfortable place, such as a beach or a garden. This relaxed state may aid healing, learning, creativity, and performance. It may help you feel more in control of your emotions and thought processes, which may improve your attitude, health, and sense of well-being.

3 Principles of Guided Imagery

Guided imagery works because of 3 very simple, common-sense principles. You already know them.

First Principle: The Mind-Body Connection

First of all, *to the body, images created in the mind can be almost as real as actual, external events*. The mind doesn't quite get the difference. That's why, when we read a recipe, we start to salivate. The mind is constructing images of the food -- how it looks, tastes and smells; it might even be evoking the sounds of the food cooking or the feel of its texture as it's being chewed. And all the while, the body is thinking "dinner is served", and is responding by generating saliva and appetite.

The mind cues the body especially well if the images evoke sensory memory and fantasy sights, sounds, smells, feel and taste and when there is a strong emotional element involved. So, for instance, a strongly evocative image might be remembering the sound and timbre of Daddy's smiling voice, telling you he's proud of you; or the internal bristling of energy all through your body as you realize that you are about to triumph at something that you are home free *golden*.

These sensory images are the true language of the body, the only language it understands, immediately and without question.

Second Principle: The Altered State

Secondly, *in the altered state, we're capable of more rapid and intense healing, growth, learning and performance*. We are even more intuitive and creative. In this ordinary but profound mind-state, our brainwave activity and our biochemistry shift. Our moods and cognition change. We can do things we couldn't in a normal, waking state lift a tree that has fallen on a child; write an extraordinarily delicious poem; replace our terror of a surgical procedure with a calming sense of safety and optimism; abate a life-threatening histamine response to a bee sting.

We wander in and out of altered states all through the day, as a matter of course. Sometimes it's not a conscious choice, and we drive past our exit on the highway. At best, the altered state is a state of relaxed focus, a kind of calm but energized alertness, a highly functional form of focused reverie. Attention is concentrated on one thing or on a very narrow band of things.

As this happens, we find we have a heightened sensitivity to the object of our attention, and a decreased awareness of other things going on around us, things we would ordinarily notice. We are so engrossed, we lose track of time or don't hear people talking to us. Or we are so focused on our tennis, we don't realized we were playing on a broken ankle, and the pain isn't perceived until the game is over.

The altered state is the power cell of guided imagery. When we consciously apply it, we have an awesome ally, a prodigious source of internal strength and skill.

Third Principle: Locus of Control

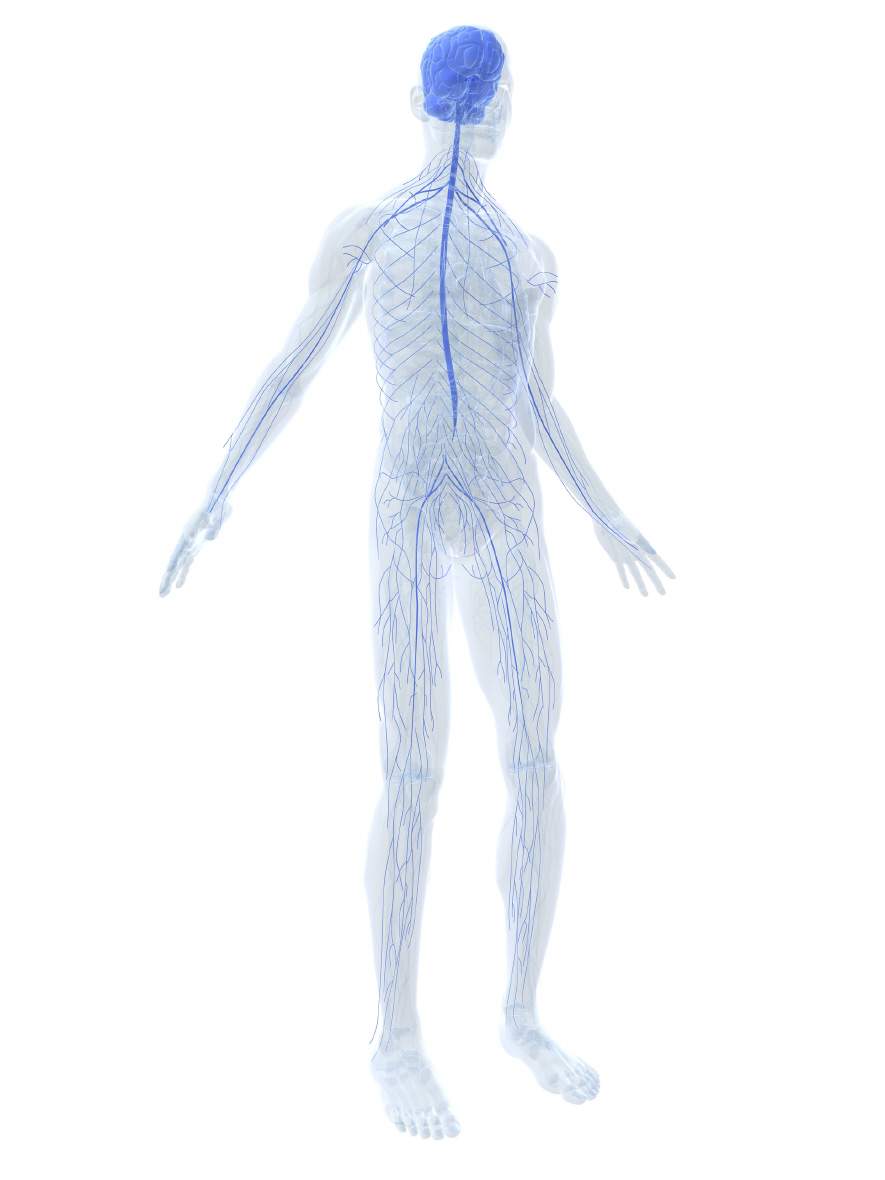
The third principle is often referred to in the medical literature as the "locus of control" factor. *When we have a sense of being in control, that, in and of itself, can help us to feel better and do better*.

Feeling in control is associated with higher optimism, self esteem, and ability to tolerate pain, ambiguity and stress. Decades of research in ego psychology informs us that we feel better about ourselves and perform better when we have a sense of mastery over the environment. Conversely, a sense of helplessness lowers self-esteem, our ability to cope and our optimism about the future.

Because guided imagery is an entirely internally driven activity, and the user can decide when, where, how and if it is applied, it has the salutary effect of helping us feel we have some control.

So, when you put all this together, you have a technique that generates an altered state, in which the mind is directed toward multi-sensory images that the body perceives as real. This is done exactly when, where and how the user wishes. And that's why it's so effective.

**Uses**

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Guided imagery has many uses including:

* To promote relaxation. It has been shown that is can lower [blood pressure](http://www.webmd.com/hw-popup/blood-pressure) and reduce other manifestations related to [stress](http://www.webmd.com/hw-popup/stress).
* To help you reach goals such as [losing weight](http://www.webmd.com/diet/default.htm), quitting [smoking](http://www.webmd.com/smoking-cessation/default.htm), or preparing for a speech.
* [To manage pain](http://www.webmd.com/pain-management/guide/pain-management-living-managing) and promote healing.

Safety: Guided imagery is safe and there are no risks are associated with it. It can be used as a primary therapy or as part of a combined therapy with conventional medicine. It may not be recommended to forgo conventional medical treatment and rely only on this as a primary therapy.

**Potential Dangers**

Guided imagery has not been associated with severe adverse effects in the available scientific literature. In theory, excessive inward focusing may cause pre-existing psychological problems or personality disorders to surface. Guided imagery is usually intended to supplement medical care, not to replace it, and guided imagery should not be relied on as the sole therapy for a medical problem. Contact a qualified health care provider if your mental or physical health is unstable or fragile.

Never use guided imagery techniques while driving or doing any other activity that requires strict attention. Be careful if you have any physical symptoms that can be brought about by stress, anxiety or emotional upset because imagery may trigger these symptoms. If you feel unusually anxious while practicing guided imagery, or if you have a history of trauma or abuse, speak with a qualified health care provider before practicing guided imagery.



**Reference**

"Guided Imagery-Topic Overview."*WebMD - Better information. Better health.*. Healthwise, Incorporated, 30 June 2009. Web. 21 Jan. 2012. <http://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/tc/guided-imagery-topic-overview>.

<http://www.healthjourneys.com/what_is_guided_imagery.asp>